

POLITICS

Russian Dirt on Clinton? 'I Love It,' Donald Trump Jr. Said

By JO BECKER, ADAM GOLDMAN and MATT APUZZO JULY 11, 2017

The June 3, 2016, email sent to Donald Trump Jr. could hardly have been more explicit: One of his father's former Russian business partners had been contacted by a senior Russian government official and was offering to provide the Trump campaign with dirt on Hillary Clinton.

The documents "would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father," read the email, written by a trusted intermediary, who added, "This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

If the future president's elder son was surprised or disturbed by the provenance of the promised material — or the notion that it was part of a continuing effort by the Russian government to aid his father's campaign — he gave no indication.

He replied within minutes: "If it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer."

Four days later, after a flurry of emails, the intermediary wrote back, proposing a meeting in New York on Thursday with a "Russian government attorney."

Donald Trump Jr. agreed, adding that he would most likely bring along "Paul Manafort (campaign boss)" and "my brother-in-law," Jared Kushner, now one of the president's closest White House advisers.

On June 9, the Russian lawyer was sitting in the younger Mr. Trump's office on the 25th floor of Trump Tower, just one level below the office of the future president.

Over the last several days, The New York Times has disclosed the existence of the meeting, whom it involved and what it was about. The story has unfolded as The Times has been able to confirm details of the meetings.

But the email exchanges, which were reviewed by The Times, offer a detailed unspooling of how the meeting with the Kremlin-connected Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, came about — and just how eager Donald Trump Jr. was to accept what he was explicitly told was the Russian government's help.

The Justice Department, as well as the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, is examining whether any of President Trump's associates colluded with the Russian government to disrupt last year's election. American intelligence agencies have determined that the Russian government tried to sway the election in favor of Mr. Trump.

The precise nature of the promised damaging information about Mrs. Clinton is unclear, and there is no evidence to suggest that it was related to Russian-government computer hacking that led to the release of thousands of Democratic National Committee emails. But in recent days, accounts by some of the central organizers of the meeting, including Donald Trump Jr., have evolved or have been contradicted by the written email records.

After being told that The Times was about to publish the content of the emails, instead of responding to a request for comment, Donald Trump Jr. tweeted out images of them himself on Tuesday.

"To everyone, in order to be totally transparent, I am releasing the entire email chain of my emails" about the June 9 meeting, he wrote. "I first wanted to just have a phone call but when that didn't work out, they said the woman would be in New York and asked if I would meet."

He added that nothing came of it.

On Monday, Donald Trump Jr. said on Twitter that it was hardly unusual to take information on an opponent. And on Tuesday morning, he tweeted, “Media & Dems are extremely invested in the Russia story. If this nonsense meeting is all they have after a yr, I understand the desperation!”

The back story to the June 9 meeting involves an eclectic cast of characters the Trump family knew from its business dealings in Moscow.

The initial email outreach came from Rob Goldstone, a British-born former tabloid reporter and entertainment publicist who first met the future president when the Trump Organization was trying to do business in Russia.

In the June 3 email, Mr. Goldstone told Donald J. Trump Jr. that he was writing on behalf of a mutual friend, one of Russia’s biggest pop music stars, Emin Agalarov. Emin, who professionally uses his first name only, is the son of Aras Agalarov, a real estate tycoon sometimes called the “Donald Trump of Russia.”

The elder Agalarov boasts close ties to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia: his company has won several large state building contracts, and Mr. Putin awarded him the “Order of Honor of the Russian Federation.”

Mr. Agalarov joined with the elder Mr. Trump to bring the Miss Universe contest to Moscow in 2013, and the Trump and Agalarov families grew relatively close.

When Emin released a music video with a theme borrowed from the television show, The Apprentice, Mr. Trump, then the show’s star, made a cameo appearance, delivering his trademark line: “You’re fired!” The elder Mr. Agalarov had also partnered with the Trumps to build a Trump hotel in Moscow, but the deal never came to fruition.

“Emin just called and asked me to contact you with something very interesting,” Mr. Goldstone wrote in the email. “The Crown prosecutor of Russia met with his father Aras this morning and in their meeting offered to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father.”

He added, “What do you think is the best way to handle this information and would you be able to speak to Emin about it directly?”

There is no such title as crown prosecutor in Russia — the Crown Prosecution Service is a British term — but the equivalent in Russia is the prosecutor general of Russia.

That office is held by Yury Yakovlevich Chaika, a Putin appointee who is known to be close to Ms. Veselnitskaya.

After sending back his “love it” reply, Donald Trump Jr. arranged to speak with Emin, sending along his private cellphone number on June 6.

“Ok he’s on stage in Moscow but should be off within 20 Minutes so I’m sure can call,” Mr. Goldstone wrote at 3:43 p.m.

Within the hour, Donald Trump Jr. had responded: “Rob thanks for the help. D.”

The following day, Mr. Goldstone followed up: “Don Hope all is well Emin asked that I schedule a meeting with you and The Russian government attorney who is flying over from Moscow for this Thursday. I believe you are aware of this meeting — and so wondered if 3pm or later on Thursday works for you?”

Mr. Goldstone’s emails contradict statements he made in his interview with The Times on Monday, when he said that he did not know whether the elder Mr. Agalarov had any role in arranging the meeting, and that he had no knowledge of any official Russian government role in the offer to provide the Trump campaign with dirt on Mrs. Clinton. Instead, he said that Ms. Veselnitskaya had contacted Emin directly, and that Emin had asked him to reach out to the Trumps as a favor to her.

“I actually asked him at one point how he knew her, and he said, ‘I can’t remember but, you know, I know thousands of people,’ ” he said in the interview.

Subsequent efforts to reach Mr. Goldstone, who acknowledged in the interview that he had spoken with someone at the Trump Organization over the weekend in

anticipation of news media attention, have been unsuccessful.

Mr. Goldstone, in a June 7 follow-up email, wrote, "I will send the names of the two people meeting with you for security when I have them later today."

By that time, as the Republican nominee, Mr. Trump was already under the protection of the Secret Service and access to Trump Tower in New York was strictly controlled. Ms. Veselnitskaya told The Times that the person who accompanied her was an interpreter whom she declined to name.

After being informed that the Russian lawyer could not make the 3 p.m. time that had been proposed, and agreeing to move it forward by an hour, Donald Trump Jr. forwarded the entire email chain to Mr. Kushner's company work email, and to Mr. Manafort at his Trump campaign email.

"Meeting got moved to 4 tomorrow at my offices," he wrote on June 8. "Best, Don."

Mr. Kushner recently disclosed the fact of the meeting, though not the content, in a revised form on which all those seeking top secret security clearances are required to list contacts with foreign government officials and their representatives. The Times reported in April that he had failed to list a number of Russian contacts, which his lawyer called an error.

Mr. Manafort also disclosed that a meeting had occurred, and that Donald Trump Jr. had organized it, in response to one of the Russia-related congressional investigations.

Representatives for both men did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Ms. Veselnitskaya arrived the next day and was ushered into Donald Trump Jr.'s office for a meeting with what amounted to the Trump campaign's brain trust.

Besides having politically connected clients, one of whom was under investigation by federal prosecutors at the time of the meeting, Ms. Veselnitskaya is well known for her lobbying efforts against the Magnitsky Act, a 2012 law that

punishes designated Russian human rights abusers by allowing the United States to seize their assets and keep them from entering the country. The law so angered Mr. Putin that he retaliated by barring American families from adopting Russian children. Her activities and associations have brought her to the attention of the F.B.I., according to a former senior law enforcement official.

When first contacted by The Times on Saturday, Donald Trump Jr. portrayed the meeting this way: “It was a short introductory meeting. I asked Jared and Paul to stop by. We primarily discussed a program about the adoption of Russian children that was active and popular with American families years ago and was since ended by the Russian government, but it was not a campaign issue at the time and there was no follow up.”

The next day, after The Times informed him that it was preparing an article that would say that the meeting also involved a discussion about potentially compromising material on Mrs. Clinton, he issued another statement: “I was asked to have a meeting by an acquaintance I knew from the 2013 Miss Universe pageant with an individual who I was told might have information helpful to the campaign. I was not told her name prior to the meeting. I asked Jared and Paul to attend, but told them nothing of the substance,” he said. “After pleasantries were exchanged, the woman stated that she had information that individuals connected to Russia were funding the Democratic National Committee and supporting Ms. Clinton. Her statements were vague, ambiguous and made no sense. No details or supporting information was provided or even offered. It quickly became clear that she had no meaningful information. She then changed subjects and began discussing the adoption of Russian children and mentioned the Magnitsky Act. It became clear to me that this was the true agenda all along and that the claims of potentially helpful information were a pretext for the meeting.”

Mr. Goldstone recalled the meeting in much the same way.

Ms. Veselnitskaya offered “just a vague, generic statement about the campaign’s funding and how people, including Russian people, living all over the world donate when they shouldn’t donate” before turning to her anti-Magnitsky Act arguments, he said. “It was the most inane nonsense I’ve ever heard.”

Ms. Veselnitskaya, for her part, said in an statement to The Times sent this past weekend that “nothing at all about the presidential campaign” had been discussed at the Trump Tower meeting, adding that she had “never acted on behalf of the Russian government” and that she had “never discussed any of these matters with any representative of the Russian government.” She has not responded to requests for comment since.

A spokesman for Mr. Putin said on Monday that he did not know Ms. Veselnitskaya and that he had no knowledge of the June 2016 meeting.

Back in Washington, both the White House and a spokesman for President Trump’s lawyer have taken pains to distance the president from the meeting, saying that he did he not attend it and that he learned about it only recently.

Mr. Agalarov did not respond to a request for comment.

Emin, the pop star at the center of it all, will not comment on the matter, either, Mr. Goldstone, his publicist, said on Monday. “Emin said to me that I could tell journalists that you know he has decided to go with just a straight no comment. His reasoning for that is simply that he believes that by him commenting in any way from Russia it once again will open this debate of Trump Trump Russia. Now here’s another person from Russia. Now he’s another person from Russia. So he wants to just not comment on the story. That’s his reasoning. It’s — the story will play out however it plays out.”

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